

A positive mindset during a pandemic

by

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The current lockdown in South Africa and many other parts of the world during the coronavirus pandemic is filled with uncertainty, fear, despair, anxiety and panic. There is so much to be negative about: With more than 9000 people infected with Covid-19 in South Africa, 180+ deaths in our country, thousands of deaths world-wide and millions of people infected. Moreover, economies worldwide have contracted and negative economic growth, or rather extended periods of recession and depression are a reality all over the world. In many countries, unemployment has more than doubled and in certain cases tripled within a month or two of economic lockdown. Seeing people standing in queues to receive food parcels is a sad state of affairs. So many people are experiencing a high level of inconvenience and discomfort, yet we are expected to continue with our lives and work if permitted to do so under lockdown level 4.

There are so many regulations to adhere to and several of them do not make sense at all. What makes sense is the overall goal of the lockdown and that is to keep people physically away from one another so that the spread of the virus can be restricted. However, if I am not allowed to sit next to my wife while driving my car to the shop and back home, but still allowed to share a bed with her, the rationality of the regulation can be questioned, as well as whether it contributes to the goal of social distancing when taxis and shops are full of people. Be that as it may, most good citizens will attempt to comply with the regulations irrespective of their rationality and effectiveness. It is important to remind ourselves that we are in a state of disaster given a global pandemic. Thus, not all rules will make sense, and we will experience negative feelings along the way.

Despite all the challenges and frustrations people experience, it is important to try and maintain a positive mind-set throughout this period, especially now that it has become clear that we are in for a rough and long ride, given the fact that the numbers of people infected are increasing at a rapid rate. Also, your personal circumstances, other setbacks, or dysfunctional family life and strained relationships may all exacerbate your level of frustration.

Today I am providing you with some guidelines on how to attempt to maintain a positive mind-set during this difficult period of lockdown:

- Decide that you will do your best to maintain a positive mind-set throughout the lockdown;
- Set small milestones for yourself, e.g. only another six days and you have survived 50 days;
- Write good and positive things down, e.g. any special achievements or positive feedback from your boss, colleagues or customers;
- Take photos of things you like around your house and post them on social media;
- Spend more time liking positive social media posts by other people;
- Post mostly positive news and refrain from engaging in negative social media posts;
- Keep a journal of your lockdown experiences, and highlight the positive things;
- Focus on the good things of the lockdown, e.g. more time with your loved ones, no time wasted in traffic, low petrol expenses, etc;

- Acknowledge and thank the people who make a positive contribution in your life;
- Reach out to your friends and family members and keep the conversations positive;
- When people complain about things, give them the positive side of the situation;
- Avoid negative self-talk and unnecessary family conflict;
- Use the period of 3 hours of exercise per day (6:00-9:00) to walk, run or cycle allowed under lockdown level 4, even if you do not exercise regularly;
- Praise other people for the good things they are doing;
- Reach out to people you may have neglected in recent times;
- Make a daily list of the things you are thankful for and share it with your family;
- Compare South Africa's statistics with other countries and you will notice that we are one of the nations doing much better than others in terms of both infections and deaths;
- Have as much fun as possible and within the limitations of the regulations, and ensure that there is a healthy atmosphere in your house;
- Take note of all the unintended positive consequences of the lockdown, such as animals and penguins walking in the streets, birds enjoying the beaches, less pollution, a drastic decrease in car accidents and crime;
- Enjoy and share jokes and good pieces of typical South African (or global) humour such as memes, quotes, cartoons and other light-hearted moments;
- Laugh as much as you can;
- Engage more with positive people and avoid negative people;
- Contribute to helping people in need if possible;
- Do the things you really like such as engaging in your hobbies if they are legal;
- Celebrate your good health and wellness;
- Ask your loved ones to help you in maintaining a positive mind-set;
- If things go wrong, take a break, refocus and work on solutions in turning it around, if possible;
- Focus on the things you can control and attempt not to worry about things you can't control;
- Evaluate your own positivity and ask your family members to evaluate one another.

Staying positive in such a traumatic situation as a lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic is not an easy task, and really dependent on whether you are able to maintain a positive mind-set throughout the crisis. All of us in lockdown will go through ups and downs, i.e. good moments and bad moments. If you ever reach a stage when you feel you can no longer cope, it is important to arrange counselling. The Health Professions Council of South Africa has now approved online therapy sessions during the lockdown. There will be days when you feel good and think that the lockdown is so good that it can go on for months, and there will be days when you just want to take the road and break all the regulations. We are in this together, but we will overcome it if we can be successful in maintaining our physical distance and by staying positive. Maintaining a positive mind-set throughout this crisis could be your greatest challenge, but also your best opportunity of surviving, moving forward and coping with this unpleasant situation.

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